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Conference Abstract

Turning a Recently-Donated Mineral Collection into a Multifaceted Learning Experience

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Abstract

The Schultz Collection is a group of over 1500 display-quality minerals which was donated to the University of California, Riverside Earth Sciences Museum last year. The collector was very systematic in assembling it, emphasizing a breadth of taxonomy, crystal forms, and uniqueness. A broad sample of mineral classes are present. Mineral species with a wide variety of forms, such as calcite, are represented by numerous diverse samples. Some of the species and gem forms, such as charoite, are only found in one location worldwide. In strictly monetary terms, it has been appraised at over $113,000 (USD; $155,000 NZD). But the true value of this collection lies in the excellent learning opportunities it has proven to hold for students, professionals, and visitors alike.

Unlike nearly all collections assembled by enthusiasts, Henry Schultz made sure his collection was both well-labelled and catalogued, with locality information available for nearly all. Coupled with the various needs it requires and the small number of specimens compared to other collections already in our possession, this makes it an ideal source of many student projects. No institution in the Inland Empire of Southern California has a formal museum studies program that includes natural history. The creation of a volunteer program in the museum and an interdepartmental Natural History Museum Club in the Natural History Collections Care Network (NHCCN) are steps towards rectifying this.

Projects run the gamut across most museum studies activities. Curation and registrar-work includes: handwriting new University of California, Riverside (UCR)-specific labels with

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archival ink as a group activity during club meetings; turning Schultz's spreadsheet into a relational database and filling in information gaps when possible; and rehousing all specimens in acid-free trays. An additional outcome is the creation of a time-saving relational database of the Dana classification system (shareable upon request). Conservation and preparation include: cleaning dust and packing material off of specimens; attempting to halt the pyrite disease in one specimen; and discussing the special care needs for certain minerals. Exhibit design and fabrication include: brainstorming exhibit sections; selecting specimens for display; and exhibit installation. Exhibit sections will in part be used to give a behind-the-scenes peek, educating the public on museum studies, with one section devoted to care of minerals and another discussing how much work students and staff have put into fully processing the collection. Education and outreach include progress updates on social media, which have a reach comparable to those discussing departmental research.

Keywords

earth science, minerals, education, student training

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